

BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS**SPECIAL MEETING****Thursday, July 19, 2001****5:00 p.m.**

Present: June Bailey, Glen Dey, Janet Miller, M.S. Mitchell, Trix Niernberger, Leon Robinson

Absent: Joe Todd

Also Present: Joe Johnson - Shaefer, Johnson, Cox & Frey Associates; Fran Crowley and Jim Ward, Wichita School Board; Martin Libhart, USD #259; Mike North – Law Department; Kathy Morgan - Wichita/Sedgwick County Metropolitan Area Planning Department; and Doug Kupper and Maryann Crockett (staff)

President Mitchell called the meeting to order at approximately 5:00 p.m. In his opening statement he thanked the public for their attendance, introduced Park Board members and staff, and briefly reviewed the meeting agenda and public hearing etiquette. He introduced Joe Johnson from Shaefer, Johnson, Cox & Frey Associates, School District consultant.

Discussion of School District Proposal - Linwood Park

Joe Johnson gave a brief background of the proposal stating that although various meetings have been held regarding relocating Linwood Elementary School to Linwood Park, the School Board has not made a decision. He mentioned his concern over “misinformation” that has been circulating on the project. He said Shaefer, Johnson, Cox & Frey were still gathering information for presentation to the governing bodies.

Johnson stated that the proposal was to construct a 60,000 square foot school facility on approximately 4.8 acres in Linwood Park. He said approximately 2.8 acres would be used for sidewalks, parking lot, driveway and the school and that the remaining acreage would be open green space. He commented that no structures would be demolished (such as the open shelter and amphitheater in the park) and that the school facility had been redesigned with a southerly entrance.

Johnson stated that they felt North Linwood Park was the logical place to locate the school and said that was what they would be recommending to the School District; however, as an alternative, they would also like to have a recommendation from the Park Board on a site in South Linwood Park. He commented that the Bond Issue Steering Committee emphasized keeping schools in neighborhoods. He stated that North Linwood Park was surrounded by houses, which they felt was a win-win situation as far as student security walking to and from school. He said in addition, they felt the school provided the neighborhood security. He mentioned that the ideal world-class school used approximately 15-20 acres to provide adequate

security setbacks. He added that when they reviewed the North Linwood Park site, they looked at the landscape in and around the proposed location in order to minimize tree removal. He concluded by stating that there would be another public meeting next Tuesday, July 24, 2001, at 7:00 p.m. at Linwood Elementary School, 1340 S. Pattie.

Trix Niernberger asked for clarification that the City would receive approximately 16.2 acres of school property in exchange for the 4.8 acres at Linwood. Johnson explained that the proposal included a recommendation to retain the multi-purpose room at Linwood Elementary School for neighborhood meetings and other park uses and that the existing Linwood Elementary School be razed and the site cleared for park use. He said that site consisted of approximately 2.1 acres. In addition, he said they would recommend that the School District consider exchanging other parcels to offset any perceived loss of park property. Janet Miller asked for the acreage on the other sites. Director Kupper stated that Wildwood Park consisted of 10 acres and the old Greiffenstein school site consisted of 6 acres.

Niernberger asked if South Linwood Park was equally acceptable to the School District. Johnson stated that in keeping with the neighborhood school concept, it did not “meet the test” as well as the North Linwood Park site. He commented that South Linwood Park was fronted by businesses on Hydraulic, which was also an arterial street, whereas North Linwood Park was residential. Niernberger inquired if the School District would be willing to exchange the Wildwood and Greiffenstein sites if the Park Board recommended South Linwood Park. Johnson said he couldn’t speak for the School District, but that proposal could be introduced for discussion.

Johnson provided board members a handout, which was an aerial map of the proposed facility. He said the proposal was to locate the parking lot in the southeast corner the park and demolish an antiquated restroom facility nearby, but that the School District would share in the cost of constructing a new facility closer to the shelter and amphitheater. He said the large stand of trees in the southwest corner of the park would remain intact. Johnson also provided a brochure that gave further explanation of the proposed project.

June Bailey mentioned the need for parks in South Wichita and added that the City has already funded considerable improvements at Wildwood Park, even though it is being leased from the School District. President Mitchell also mentioned development of Garvey Park and the need for an entrance off of Hydraulic. He said that might be possible provided the School District gives the City access or an easement across USD #259 property. He said in the spirit of cooperation the City and School District have established on-going dialogue to discuss the best uses of City and School District properties citywide. Jim Ward commented that he agreed that communication has been good between the School District, City and Park and Recreation Department.

Public Comment:

- Dale Churchman, 1357 S. Broadway, member of the Historic Preservation Board, South Central Progressive Association and South Central Improvement Alliance – commented that as far as he was concerned giving and gaining acreage was not the point. He said Linwood Park is an historical area that dates back to the pioneer days. He said heritage, tradition and history couldn’t be traded for a piece of property. He said he could not see

this type of proposal being considered at College Hill or Riverside and added that Linwood Park, which dates back to the 1880's was older than both of those areas. He concluded by mentioning the possible adverse affect on the park wildlife and stated that he was opposed to locating the school in either North or South Linwood Park.

- Vicky Churchman, 1357 S. Broadway – stated that although she was a teacher and was very excited about the new school, she was opposed to building a school facility in an historical park such as Linwood. She said she felt the land had been donated to the City specifically for park purposes.
- Jim Ward, School Board Member, Third District – mentioned the process that the City and School District were going through which included presentation of information to the public, exploration of new ideas and continued discussion. He said he looked forward to explaining the School District's objectives and what they would like to see happen in North Linwood Park at the meeting on July 24.
- Letter from Jody Bennett, 1709 E. 48th St., South. President Mitchell read Bennett's letter, which contained the following points: "...that she opposed placing Linwood Park on the registry of historical sites, because it would prove too costly and too cumbersome; that she opposed directly ceding park space to USD #259 without significant land exchange that is, can, or will be developed within south Wichita by 2005; that the City Council should commit adequate funding for development and maintenance of any acquired park acreage; and that USD #259 should design Linwood School as a "lighted" facility to be shared with the community...."
- Fran Crowley, School Board Member – commented that she understand the Board's focus was parks citywide, while the School District's focus was schools citywide. She said she appreciated the opportunity to continue dialogue on the proposal in a civil and civic manner.
- Martin Libhart, Wichita School District – with regard to wildlife concerns, he mentioned USD #259's Outdoor Wild Life (OWL) Program, which incorporated the study of wildlife habitat, natural plantings, outdoor learning labs and other environmental studies. He commented that this program would fit in well at the proposed Linwood Park site.

President Mitchell clarified the issue by stating that he felt there was considerable neighborhood opposition to the North Linwood Park site. He said if Linwood Park South was acceptable, and the legal issues could be overcome, he felt the Board needed to make a recommendation on both sites separately. There was brief discussion concerning a possible Park and Recreation budget increase if the Wildwood and Greiffenstein sites were acquired; the "lighted" school concept; school enrollment (would increase to approximately 450 students from the current 300 at Linwood Elementary School); the fact that the majority of students lived East of Canal Route (I-135) and that the two pedestrian walkways would be highly utilized by students.

June Bailey asked if there was any other property in the area that would work better? Martin Libhart responded that, to their knowledge, there was not enough vacant land available to support the complex the School District needed to construct. He commented that the nationally acceptable standard for new schools was between 10-15 acres.

Niernberger asked for information on the deed restrictions. Mike North, City Law Department, explained that there were two conveyances of property to the City, one in 1880 and one in 1926. He said there were restrictive covenants concerning use of the property for park purposes. Niernberger asked if the original 40 acres was limited to North Linwood Park? North explained that the City was currently researching that issue.

Niernberger asked about the ramifications of the proposed historical designation. Kathy Morgan, Wichita-Sedgwick County Metropolitan Area Planning Department, briefly explained the process for designating a site as historical. She said Linwood Park would probably fall under the category of a place that was associated with a significant person such as a founding father, under which she felt Henry Schweiter would certainly qualify. She added that Linwood might also qualify as an archeological site because it is over 50 years old and because of the realignment of Chisholm Creek. Responding to a question from Niernberger, Morgan stated that the Historic Preservation Board requested that staff proceed to gather preliminary site information to document the application for Linwood as an historical site. She said once that information has been documented, the application would be sent to the State office for review and forwarding to the national level. Responding to another question, she explained that private individuals may make applications on either public or private property.

Niernberger asked if the park was designated as an historical site, could the school still be built on the property? Morgan said yes; however, there would have to be a review process by the Historical Preservation Board, including public comment, prior to the start of any construction. She also mentioned that any property within 500 feet of the site would fall under the same design review process. She said any design appeals would go to the City Council for final review and approval/disapproval. She said after the City Council's ruling, any appeals could be filed with the State District Court.

There was general discussion regarding findings of negative impact, designation as an urban park (Morgan indicated she would have to check the legislation on that designation), timing of the historical designation, archeological evaluation of the site (Morgan indicated that an archeological evaluation may have already been done). Janet Miller asked if the School District would have any objections to the historical designation. Johnson commented that they felt it was a win-win situation, but he could not speak for the School District. He mentioned that the surrounding neighbors might object. He said it appeared that the designation process could take anywhere from six months to one year, but he did not feel it would hold up construction. Responding to a question, he stated that if the proposal was acceptable to the City and School District, construction could start in Fall of 2003.

Morgan referred to Dale Churchman's remarks and stated that any structure the magnitude of a school would significantly alter the historical element of the park; that taking a piece of the park would change the entire site. She added that she felt construction of the school would negatively impact a site that has been used exclusively as a park for over 100 years. Responding to a question from Glen Dey, Morgan stated that the park area was a significant contributor to the neighborhood development and that there was no telling how that area would have developed if it had not been for the park.

Bailey asked when the request for historical designation was received by the Historic Preservation Board (July 9, 2001) and why not until now? Morgan responded that the park has

been there for over 100 years and that no one ever thought about the possibility of losing it. She added that the Board also instructed staff to evaluate all parkland in terms of historical significance. There was brief discussion regarding how historical designation of park areas could affect various park renovation, improvement and construction projects. Morgan indicated that the Historic Preservation Board would be more concerned with structures like Park Villa and Works Project Administration projects, rather than maintenance issues.

On Motion by Bailey, second by Dey, IT WAS VOTED to recommend that City staff continue to negotiate an agreement with the School District to locate the school in either North or South Linwood Park with the condition of exchanging the Wildwood Park and Greiffenstein sites as part of the trade.

Niernberger said she was uncomfortable with the motion due to legal issues with the deed and the historical nature of the park.

With permission of the second, the motion was amended to clarify that the Park Board considered North Linwood to be the preferred site.

Motion passed 5-1. No - Niernberger

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 6:30 p.m.

M.S. Mitchell, President

ATTEST:

Maryann Crockett, Clerk
Recording Secretary